



Winter Safety • Advice on Ice

Every winter, 25 to 30 Canadians die in ice-related incidents, and countless others fall through the ice and have brushes with death. Muskoka Lakes are busy every winter with ice fishing and across-water snowmobiling. So here are a few ice safety tips that winter sports enthusiasts should keep in mind before venturing out on frozen water. ***Be Smart. Be Safe.***

Remember the thicknesses below are merely guidelines for new clear solid ice and that many factors other than thickness can cause ice to be unsafe.

There is no such thing as 100 percent safe ice!

4" of new clear ice is the minimum thickness for travel on foot.

5" is minimum for snowmobiles and ATVs.

8"- 12" for cars or small trucks.



Check for known thin ice areas with a local resort or bait shop. Test the thickness yourself using an ice chisel, ice auger or even a cordless 1/4 inch drill with a long bit.

Refrain from driving on ice whenever possible. If you must drive a vehicle, be prepared to leave it in a hurry: keep windows down, unbuckle your seat belt and have a simple emergency plan of action you have discussed with your passengers.

Stay away from alcoholic beverages. Even "just a couple of beers" are enough to cause a careless error in judgment that could cost you your life. And contrary to common belief, alcohol actually makes you colder rather than warming you up.

Don't "overdrive" your snowmobile's headlight. At even 50 km per hour, it can take a much longer distance to stop on ice than your headlight shines. Many fatal snowmobile through-the-ice accidents occur because the machine was traveling too fast for the operator to stop when the headlamp illuminated the hole in the ice.

Wear a life vest under your winter gear, or wear one of the new flotation snowmobile suits. And it's a good idea to carry a pair of ice picks that may be home made or purchased from most well stocked sporting goods stores that cater to winter anglers. It's amazing how difficult it can be to pull yourself back onto the surface of unbroken but wet and slippery ice while wearing a snowmobile suit weighted down with 60 lbs of water. The ice picks really help pulling yourself back onto solid ice. **CAUTION: Do NOT wear a flotation device when traveling across the ice in an enclosed vehicle!**

Always supervise children playing on or near ice.

Children playing on or near ice should always be with a buddy and under adult supervision.

See other side...

What should you do if a companion falls through thin ice?

1. **Keep calm and think out a solution.**
2. **Don't run up to the hole.** You'll probably break through and then there will be two victims.
3. **Use some item on shore to throw or extend to the victim** to pull them out of the water such as jumper cables or skis, or push a boat ahead of you.
4. **If you can't rescue the victim immediately, call 911.** It's amazing how many people carry cellphones.
5. **Get medical assistance for the victim.** People who are subjected to cold water immersion but seem fine after being rescued can suffer a potentially fatal condition called "after drop" that may occur when cold blood that is pooled in the body's extremities starts to circulate again as the victim starts to re-warm.

What if YOU fall in?

Try not to panic. Instead, remain calm and turn toward the direction you came from. Place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface of the ice (here's where ice picks would come in handy.) Work forward on the ice by kicking your feet. If the ice breaks, maintain your position and slide forward again. Once you are laying on the ice, don't stand. Instead, roll away from the hole. That spreads out your weight until you are on solid ice. This sounds much easier than it is to do in reality.

The best advice is don't put yourself into needless danger by venturing out too soon or too late in the season.